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THE

EDUCATIONAL FRANCHISE

WITH OBSERVATIONS

ON ITS APPLICATION IN

ITALY AND BELGIUM,

BY

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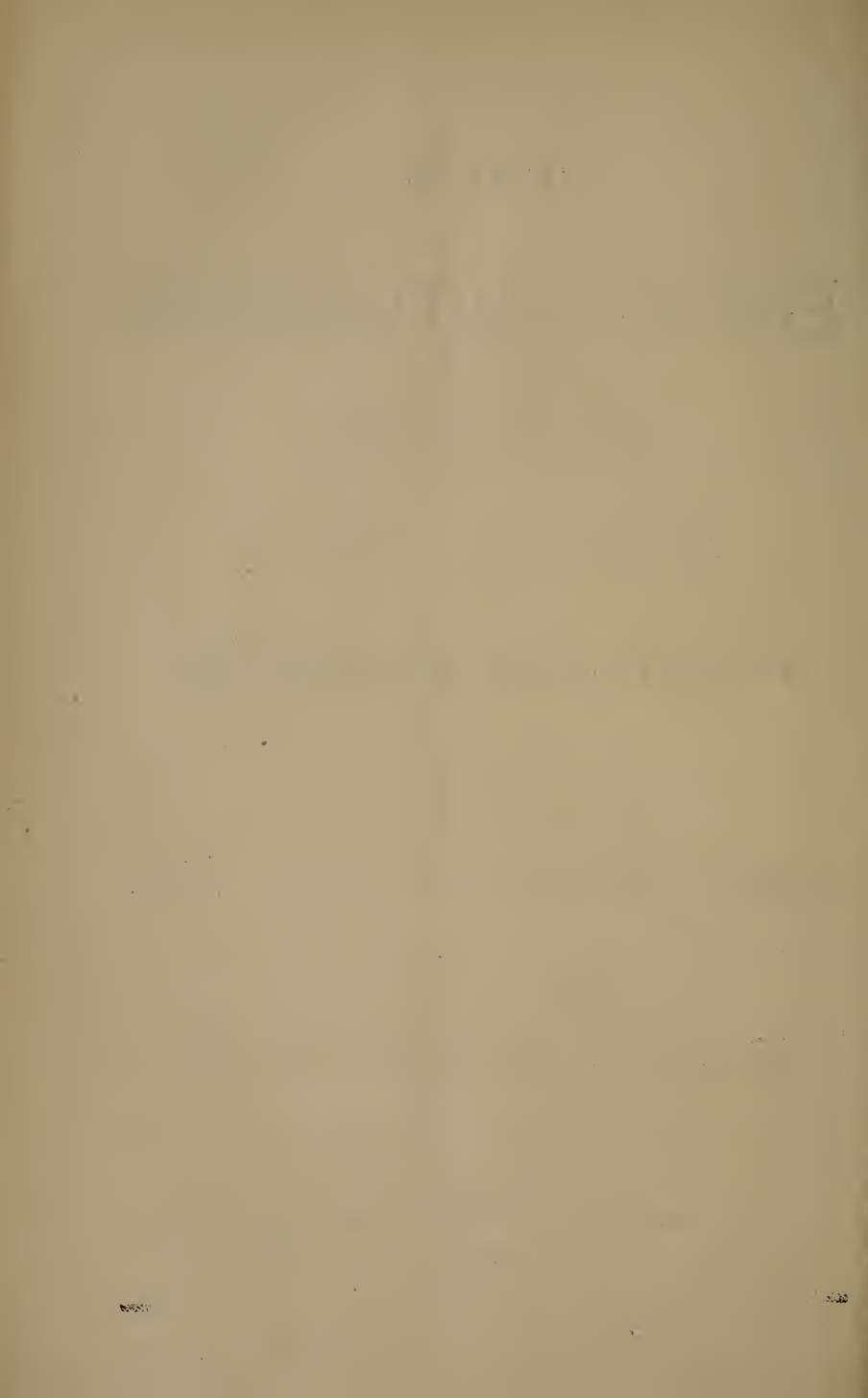
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APOLOGIA.

Dear Reader,—I think I hear you ask me “What, in the name of goodness, makes you turn pamphleteer? Can’t you find anything better to do?” My answer is: I certainly did not write it for the fun of the thing (for my hands are full enough of other work without meddling with politics), but to call the attention of our legislators to a matter which has somehow been overlooked in the present political warfare. The welfare of the British Empire—and, more or less, of the whole human race—depends upon the *intelligence and character of our future electorate*, and yet no one seems to propose the application of any direct process for selecting the fit and rejecting the unfit. In advocating an educational test, *I advocate no new thing, but something which is already in operation*; and—what *in politics* is most remarkable—which has no opponents of note amongst any of the political parties, but is gladly accepted by everyone in the countries where this test is in force. Any proposal to admit the ignorant to the franchise is looked upon as irrational, even by the ~~illiterate~~ themselves. And, further, a somewhat lengthened residence in Italy has enabled me to observe upon the spot and appreciate the dangers which that nation has escaped by the use of the wise proviso that the voting power shall be confined to those whose education fits them to weigh political matters for themselves.

Believing that Political Science is even more strictly an experimental one than are Chemistry and Physics, I have appealed to the evidence of demonstrated political experiments rather than to abstract argument to support my propositions, and have proposed nothing which has not withstood satisfactorily the test of practical experience.

Hoping that the subject may receive the attention which it deserves,

I am, yours faithfully,

JAMES HARGREAVES.

Widnes,

May, 1884.

THE EDUCATIONAL FRANCHISE.

Amongst the proposed qualifications for the franchise I see no-reference to education as a test of fitness. It is true that one party objects to the extension of the franchise on the ground of ignorance and want of education amongst those to whom it is proposed to give this important trust, upon which the highest interests of the empire depend. Another party contends that the persons proposed to be enfranchised are sufficiently educated and intelligent to be safely trusted with business of such transcendent importance. I have seen as yet no proposal that an educational test should be applied, which—while admitting those who are capable of exercising an independent judgment, by calmly reading for themselves the *pros* and *cons* of political science—shall exclude those who depend upon the *viva voce* declamations of partizans, in which he who declaims loudest, and indulges in the most violent vituperation, has the greatest chance of carrying his point. It is not in excited public meetings that political arguments are best weighed, but in calm reading (of which the illiterate is incapable) and thoughtful reflection, the habit of which is seldom acquired except by the mental and moral discipline enforced in school during the educational period. *The discipline of the scholar is necessary to prepare for the discipline of citizenship*, and I challenge any of my readers to point out a single large state, or even a town, no matter what may be the natural advantages of its soil or position, or the character of its political constitution, which is well governed when the electors are illiterate. Take as examples the republics of South and Central America, where there has been from their first institution a continual series of never-ending rebellions and revolutions. No sooner is a new government established, than those partizans who think that

they have not a sufficient share of the plunder begin spouting about "the oppression" of their new rulers, make frantic speeches about "*la libertad*," and shortly there is either a mob shot down by the soldiers, or perhaps a "*pronunciamiento*" by the army itself, finishing off with the assassination of the newly elected president by the stilettos of these angels of liberty, who have never yet been taught that it is dangerous to entrust political power to those who cannot use it wisely and honestly. Illiteracy may be compatible with the good government of a village, where the electors know all the persons and circumstances (always of course provided that they possess honesty and natural intelligence), but in an immense empire like ours, *containing 20 per cent. of the whole human race*, the voter should be able to judge for himself, and not be dependent upon some loud-mouthed demagogue, whose chief qualifications are audacity and unscrupulous mendacity, and whose tactics consist in arousing mutual hatred between province and province, and between class and class. Though the educational test already exists in at least two European states—Belgium and Italy—our professional politicians seem not to be aware of it, nor to have studied its probable effect upon the quality of the future electorate; and yet, next to honesty, the most important tests of fitness are intelligence and industry. Education is the best test of the presence of all these qualities; without the exercise of the two latter, education cannot be acquired, and they may, as a rule, be depended upon to teach the importance of the former.

The politics of any country with an illiterate electorate are never stable or rational for a long time together. I know something personally of the French working class electors. The illiterate portions belong, as a general rule, to the two irrational political extremes. In the country places the priest practically dictates to them from the confessional how they must vote. In the towns, self-seeking leaders promise them wealth and exemption from labour by means which outrage both justice and poli-

tical economy, and set natural, moral, and physical laws at defiance. The voters are mere passive tools at the command of the most unscrupulous bidder for their votes, and it is a pure matter of chance or skilful management who shall have them. The votes, in fact, are not given to those illiterates at all, but rather to those who are most expert in flattering and cajoling them.

In Italy we have another experimental case. Here is a nation founded only yesterday, with populations even more impulsive and less reflective than those of France; without experience in constitutional government; with local hatreds and prejudices of long standing; with local dialects unintelligible to the rest of the nation; and with a clerical party whose energies are all directed to the breaking up of the national unity; and yet, in spite of all this, welded into a united whole, and carrying on a consistent national policy, with remarkably few of those mistakes which those who knew her best at one time feared she would commit. The reason for this is that the franchise is only entrusted to educated persons; and though mutual distrust is not absent even amongst these, it is immeasurably smaller than amongst the illiterate. The educated have no dialectic lines of separation, but acknowledge and use the "*lingua toscana in bocca romana*" as their standard of language. The illiterate part of the population are declared by the constitution incapable of exercising the franchise, except in a few special cases, thus excluding those most likely to be influenced by local prejudices. The unity of Italy would be broken up tomorrow if the illiterate were admitted to the franchise, for the clericals and anarchists would return between them a majority to parliament, or, at least, such a large minority as would render *constitutional* government impossible, leaving only the choice between despotism and anarchy, which invariably accompanies an illiterate constituency. The clerical and anarchist parties find their strength and influence mainly in trading upon the easily excited hatreds and

jealousies of the ignorant. The clerical party is using, and will continue to use, all its power to break up that unity which has done so much to lessen its influence; for the educated classes are not so easily influenced by any of the threats, promises, or arguments of a clergy which has, with but a few notable exceptions, a mediocre education, decidedly inferior to that of the other learned and professional classes, such as in the law, medicine, technology, military science, and engineering.

As an instance of the effect of education upon cohesive loyalty to the state, I may mention Prussia, which, though divided geographically into fractions throughout North Germany, and some of these fractions actually detached by the intervention of other territory from the main portions of the state, held itself loyally together until it formed a nucleus around which modern Germany could crystallize. This coherence only became possible when Stein and other educational reformers banished illiteracy, by the use of the most complete and elaborate school system which, up to that date, the world had ever known, and made the discipline of the scholar preparatory to that of the citizen and soldier.

In all countries it is principally among the illiterate that local hatreds and prejudices exist, and it is amongst them that the prophets of discord find their chief supporters. In the United Kingdom, as in Italy and Prussia, the loyalty of the population and its coherence with the state is very much in proportion to its degree of education.

In the United Kingdom we have an illustration of the same principle. The strength of disintegrationalist politicians is *directly in proportion to the prevalence of illiteracy*, whether we take a geographical or religious basis of distinction. The illiterates in Ireland distinguished by religious belief are—

Roman Catholics	46 per cent.
Protestants.....	25 „
Methodists	15½ „

(I give this on the authority of Dr. Playfair, who stated it in a discussion on Irish education in the House of Commons last year, and it has never yet, to my knowledge, been called in question.) Again, the places which return representatives of a disloyal type are precisely those in which ignorance most prevails.

If an educational qualification were adopted, the disqualifications in the United Kingdom, as in Belgium and Italy, would fall most heavily on that part of the population which is most under priestly influence, and it is a suggestive comment upon the pretensions of the Roman Church to be the great friend of education, that in the countries which have been most subject to its influence, disqualification, in consequence of illiteracy, strikes her devotees more severely than those of any other sect or party. Nor in the case of Ireland would it be at all unjust that it should be so. Ireland has had for 30 years before England a system of National Schools provided largely at the expense of the State, but the priesthood have put all kinds of difficulties in the way of their people being educated, and actually put pressure upon the parents to keep their children from school. In England, Wales, and Scotland the influence of this action is severely felt, for a majority of the Irish Catholic population who have resorted there for employment, are either illiterate or with so little education as to find neither pleasure nor profit in reading. It is almost entirely amongst these illiterates that the disloyal demagogues are preaching rebellion, and trying to stimulate hatred against the very persons amongst whom they live and obtain a livelihood. If the illiterates amongst them were disfranchised, the whole pretensions of the disloyal would be at once destroyed, for their hold upon the educated portion of the Irish population, *whether Catholic or Protestant*, in the other parts of the United Kingdom is very small indeed. Of course, there would be the usual cry of injustice, which is always raised when demagogues are not allowed to do their

mischief unchecked; but to this there is the ready reply, that "you can have a vote as soon as you will take the trouble to make yourself capable of exercising it." If a man will not give himself so much trouble, there needs no further proof of his unfitness. Many of the denizens of the more squalid portions of our large towns are absolutely unfit to exercise the franchise in consequence of their ignorance, and would be more likely to exercise it to their own detriment than to their benefit; besides putting the state at the mercy of the demagogues who flattered them most on purpose to obtain their votes.

Those who oppose the female franchise give, as their reason for doing so, that females are more emotional, less reflective, and less educated than men, as a rule, and hence the interests of the State would be endangered by entrusting them with the franchise. I do not discuss the merits of this question here, but what are we to think of a franchise which excludes Florence Nightingale, but will allow a "corner man" to vote, though he may have only just come out of jail, where he has had to pay the penalty of outraged laws? Nobody proposes to enfranchise children, but the State would be safer in the care of educated schoolboys than of such men. But even here the Italians can give us a "wrinkle." Such a man as the above would be struck off the register when convicted of crime, and would not be allowed to be put on again until *twelve months after the expiration of his sentence*.

The well-being of a state or a city depends less upon its constitutional forms than upon the *character and intelligence of its citizen electors*. As an experimental proof of this, we may take two cities existing under practically the same constitutional conditions. These are Boston and New York. The former inhabited principally by persons brought up under liberal education laws, and where education is enforced, while the proportion of illiterate immigrants is small. Good government prevails, the city is well ordered and kept, taxation is moderate, and the

civic debt small. The elections are conducted without noise or uproar, the electors not being of the class who are led astray with noisy vituperation. In New York the exact opposite prevails. The police are a terror to the law-abiding citizens rather than to the criminals, the sanitary state is exceedingly bad, the death rate being more than one-fourth greater than in London, a city four times its size. Taxation is so oppressive that there have been instances of persons giving up their property rather than pay the taxes upon it. The city *debt* is enormous, with nothing in proportion to show for it. The respectable portion of the citizens are seriously proposing to ask the State government to curtail the powers of the city council, and so save them from barefaced robbery by their fellow citizens. In fact, New York city is a bye-word all over the United States for abuses and mismanagement. How then must the difference between these two cities be accounted for? Of the two, New York is the better situated, and has better chances of progress. The reason is that, in addition to a rather large proportion of illiterates of its own raising, the city is largely inhabited and its government elected by illiterate immigrants, who are manipulated by the Tammany Caucus. Grogsellers are amongst the principal wire pullers of this electoral machine, aided by others who deliberately, and of set purpose, enrich themselves by plundering the city through the medium of its government, and the illiteracy and ignorance of the manipulated voters allow the evil to be perpetuated. Of course, the persons who are robbing the city, roundly abuse everybody who tries to stop these abuses. And why not? When a man plunders his neighbour, is his conscience likely to be too sensitive to slander him also? Or is he likely to be so modest as to hesitate to proclaim himself about the only honest man in the city, (of course excepting those whom he is flattering for the time being with the object of getting their votes?)

It is only in a city governed by the nominees of such electors

that it is possible to proclaim and carry out in open day a policy of systematic assassination by dynamite.

In Paris, all the quarters which contain the most illiterate population return Communist representatives to the city council. The national government finds it necessary to refuse what we regard as commonplace civic rights, though if it were safe it would be only too happy to authorise the full and free exercise of those rights, if only to increase its own popularity. The city is under coercion laws far more stringent than those now in force in Ireland, and yet this excites no comment, because it is seen to be necessary. A man may do and say many things in Dublin, which, in Paris, would at once consign him to prison. Some of our *doctrinaire* carpers taunt the French Government for this restraint of freedom in a city whose buildings are so conspicuously emblazoned with the words LIBERTÉ, ÉGALITÉ, FRATERNITÉ. To these gentlemen I would remark, "Be a little more modest. Those who are on the spot know the whole circumstances rather better than you are likely to do. They have had some hard practical experience, which has knocked all the sentimentalism out of them, and the experiment of the Commune is rather too costly, inconvenient, and risky to be repeated with a light heart."

It would be well if both Houses of Parliament would, before coming to a decision on the Reform Bill, carefully study for themselves the lately reformed electoral laws of Italy and Belgium, and obtain the fullest information as to how they work in practice. From these they may obtain many valuable hints, and avoid some mistakes *which, if once made, could never be rectified*. Both countries have borrowed largely from us, and freely acknowledge it, and we may, without a blush, avail ourselves of some of the knowledge afforded by their political experiments. In Belgium, the late reform act has practically been a new education act. Night schools for adults are opening all over the country to give the education necessary

before obtaining the franchise. Those who, by intelligence and industry, acquire the needful education obtain votes. Those who are too idle or too stupid to do this, of course, have to go without. If the energies of some of our agitators could be turned in this direction, it would be better for everybody, themselves included. Of this I feel convinced, that if the country were appealed to on the question, there would be an immense majority who would support the demand for an educational qualification, something like that required in Belgium and Italy. There is no excuse for ignorance in these days, and anyone who remains illiterate proves, *ipso facto*, that he is deficient in the qualities necessary in one upon whose honesty and intelligence the most precious interests of the state depend.

I had got thus far when I happened to see the following paragraph in a Liverpool newspaper. I make no comments of my own upon it, but leave it to the consideration of our legislators, and of those who elect them :—

LIVERPOOL ECHO, April 14th, 1854.—The experience of the evils of the illiterate vote is now, it may be noted, attracting serious attention in the United States, and it is there proposed to amend the Constitution so as to preclude any person from voting either on national or State affairs unless he can read and write, whilst another measure proposes to prohibit the naturalisation of any person who cannot read and write. This exclusion would, no doubt, act as a very beneficial stimulus to education. Deterrents to crime of all shades might, besides, be found by following the lead of the Swiss cantons, whose laws forbid the admission of a bankrupt to the franchise, on the ground that such a man must be unthrift and untrustworthy. If this were adopted, then others who had been convicted of the adulteration of food, of fraudulent falsification, or of the use of false weights and measures, would also be excluded, as well as those imprisoned for any serious crime. Temperance advocates are also eager that no one who has been twice convicted of drunkenness shall be admitted or continued in the exercise of the franchise. This would be done by the magistrates' clerk sending a certificate of the convictions to the electoral registrar, who thereupon would remove his name from the voting list. Two convictions for wifebeating and other acts of cruelty are also urged as reasons for the withdrawal of the right to vote by those who are anxious to see the franchise, as they think it ought to be, *a certificate of intelligence, morality, and respectability*.

In Italy the would-be voter makes, in his own handwriting, his application to be put upon the register, stating his name,

age, address, and occupation, and the qualification upon which he claims his vote, and *this he must write and sign in the presence of the whole registration court.* He must have shown himself capable of passing an examination in education, *at least* equal to the fifth standard of our board schools.

Any person guilty of crime is struck off the register, and cannot be restored to it until one year after the expiration of his sentence. A bankrupt is also struck off, and can only be restored to it when his bankruptcy is at an end.

There are votes allowed to those who fought in the battles of Italian unity and independence, although they may be illiterate, it being considered that they have given proofs of their loyalty of the most undoubtful kind, but the number of these tends every year to decrease, and even they are disfranchised when they fail to fulfil the moral qualifications of freedom from crime, pauperism, and bankruptcy.

Besides the above reasons, there is *the biological one* for eliminating a very undesirable class of electors. Every race produces a less or greater proportion of individuals of low congenital type, possessing little or no power of moral self-control, or of the self-coercion needed to form the character of the moral and industrious citizen. It is from the individuals of this type that our criminal classes and chronic drunkards are chiefly raised. Other things being equal, a larger than the general average proportion of these individuals (partly from want of natural intellectual capacity, and partly from want of self-coercive power) fail to fulfil the requirements demanded by an educational qualification, and hence a smaller proportion would be admitted to vote. No politician will contend that it is desirable to have persons of this type on the electoral roll. Although an educational test will not exclude them absolutely, it will exclude almost all of the worst and most undesirable portion of them, and this may be rendered still more efficacious by a clause for

the exclusion of criminals, such as exists in the constitutional laws of Italy.

Personation may be made almost impossible in an educated constituency, by the following means. The voter, on entering the polling booth, fills up publicly and in his own hand-writing and affixes his signature to a form stating his name, age, residence, occupation, and the qualification upon which he votes. If these are found to correspond with the statements in the register, he is granted his ballot paper, which he fills up for himself in secret. He can in any case only be personated by one of about his own age, and the punishment due to forgery is sufficient to deter any except the most rash from exposing themselves to the risks entailed, and the advice to "vote early and vote often" would find few followers.

No one proposes that we should have a permanently ignorant class of electors. The choice lies between enfranchising first and educating afterwards, or educating first and enfranchising afterwards.

In the first case you run the risk of the education not following the enfranchisement. And what do you propose to do in the meantime while *your masters* are being educated? In the second case enfranchisement becomes the stimulus to education by providing a reward for it.

The first course is full of risks to the state. The second avoids those risks, and yet excludes no one who is fit to be trusted with a vote.

When you have enfranchised the householder, there will still follow *demands* for manhood suffrage and female suffrage, and either you or your successors will, in all probability, be constrained, willingly or otherwise, to grant them at some future day; but you may feel assured that ignorance and crime being once legally proclaimed to be a barrier to the *possession* of the full *powers* of citizenship, there will never be a cry raised for the enfranchisement of the ignorant and the criminal.

T. S. Swale, Printer, Victoria Road, Widnes.





